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COEDUCATION AGAIN

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Woman's right to the higher education is no longer disputed; at least not on this side of the Atlantic. How and where she shall obtain it is still a matter of controversy. Shall it be within the walls of that twentieth-century convent, a woman's college, or in a college affiliated with an established institution for men? or shall it be within this very institution itself? The choice of parents in this matter will be influenced by tradition, personal prejudice, geographical and economic factors, and by the character of the young woman concerned. If the father is a New Englander, it will be either the woman's college, or the college co-ordinated with a foundation for men; but if he belongs to the Middle West or the farther West, his choice will fall in most cases upon the state university or the small coeducational college. When the University of Michigan opened its doors to the first woman student in 1870, coeducation made a great advance over the beginning that had been made earlier by Oberlin and other church colleges. This was nearly forty years ago, a sufficiently long time, it would seem, for educators and laymen to have agreed as to its failure or success. But this is not the case; for at frequent intervals it becomes a theme for discussion in educational literature and at various assemblies of teachers. Indeed, a recent novel has the system of coeducation for a motive, and puts it in the stocks for all who will read to scoff at. An arraignment of more than ordinary vehemence has come recently from President Hamilton, of Tufts College, who prophesies that all institutions in New England which admit both sexes, will eventually become women's colleges. More specifically, he says: "The average young man will no longer attend a coeducational institution. He does not feel at home with women in the same

classroom;" whereupon he proceeds to recommend that the men and women be segregated in the institution over which he presides. If President Hamilton will compare the number of men taking technical courses in Tufts College with those in the department of liberal arts, the true explanation of the situation will perhaps dawn upon him. Young women are not driving young men out of the classrooms where the humanities are taught; but commercialism and the economic conditions of the time are luring them into the workshops of the engineering departments, which are full to overflowing. The catalogue of the University of Michigan for 1907-8 gives an enrolment of 1,795 in the College of Liberal Arts, of whom 681 are women, and 1,345 in the College of Engineering, of whom 2 are women. These figures tell their own story. I make bold to say that not one of the young men studying some form of engineering in this university was influenced in his choice of a profession by the presence of the 681 young women in the literary department. So long as the undeveloped resources of this country afford large opportunities for making money, so long will commercialism prevail; so long will the pursuit of culture be largely in the hands of the women. That it is for the most part in their hands is pretty generally acknowledged. This fact was stated with special felicity by Bishop Spalding, in an address before the National Education Association, given at Buffalo in 1896. If American men are content to be of the Philistines, let the women be given every chance to keep the lamp of culture burning, until the pursuit of dollars has ceased to be the prime motive of American life. That our women will lose their zeal for things of the spirit, we need not fear.

While we grant that coeducation has not fully satisfied expectations during its forty years' trial, we ask whether it has been tried on any large scale under really acceptable conditions. The fair-minded critic admits that it has not. When women in large numbers began to demand the higher education, provisions for satisfying them had to be created, and state universities, by virtue of their public character, were constrained to become coeducational as a few denominational colleges had already done for

other reasons. These universities had been most highly developed in the newer parts of the country, where cheapness in education was demanded by public sentiment. Such conditions were unfavorable to that emphasis upon residence which so impresses the American visitor to Oxford and Cambridge. The mode of living which women students are still obliged to adopt in the majority of coeducational institutions, especially state universities, leaves much to be desired. No suitable provision for their college life awaited their entrance, and none has followed it. Without traditions of their own, and without guidance from educational authorities, the women modeled their social life after that of the men. Side by side with the fraternity and fraternity house sprang up the sorority and the sorority house. Seldom was a suitable patroness placed at the head of this; but it was rather left to the direction of the twelve or twenty inexperienced girls who were responsible for its existence, though not one of the number could properly oversee a home. Here the "hop" of the "frat" house and the society lady's "afternoon" are attempted, with the expenditure to be covered by sacrificing some ordinary propriety of housekeeping. Not yet does the American father treat daughter and son with financial impartiality; the "woman's century" will be far advanced before fathers and husbands cease putting the question regarding the ten cents of yesterday.

Not until the question of residence has been much more wisely considered than hitherto, will coeducation have received a fair trial. State universities should provide houses for women students, where nice personal habits and the graces of social life can be fostered; and women of culture and social position should preside over these. At Oxford and Cambridge, the halls for women are in the care of ladies of very high connections in the social, political, and literary world. It does not answer the question to say that a state government cannot afford such expenditure; as soon as fathers and mothers demand it, the appropriations will be forthcoming. The creation of the office of dean of women is a beginning of the needed reform; though prejudice has sometimes accorded scant courtesy to women's deans. President Van Hise, of the University of Wisconsin, has expressed the

wish that the young women in coeducational colleges might borrow an independent social life from the *colleges for women* alone.¹ With proper provision for residence and social oversight, they might do so.

However, the social life of the woman's college is not altogether perfect. That such an institution is the best place for many girls is true. Nevertheless, a close examination of the "college life" there shows too great a leaning to the boarding school. The social side of the woman's college is threatening to overshadow the educational, if it has not already done so. Not long ago, a prominent lady in one of our cities, herself a college graduate and a person of fine scholarship, said to the writer: "I wish my daughter to have the college life; but I do not care whether she learns anything from books or not." This feeling, of which there is much at the present moment, will shortly change the woman's college into a new sort of "finishing" school, unless that institution shows a stronger resistance than it is momentarily doing.

¹ See the *Educational Review* for December, 1907.